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ABSTRACT

In order to assess differences in social behavior patterns among ethnic groups, videotapes were produced of eight brief social episodes that occur commonly in elementary schools, each taped once with Black actors and once with Mexican-American actors. These were shown to 127 Black and Mexican-American boys and girls from third and sixth grade classes in integrated urban classrooms. The children were shown the films with actors from their own ethnic group and were asked to write what they would do in each situation. Responses were coded into categories, and chi square analysis was used to examine ethnic group differences overall and by age and sex. There were significant ethnic group differences on five of the eight scenes. The differences were stronger at the sixth grade level than at the third grade level, and more evident among boys than girls. The results provide evidence that cultural differences which have been identified among adults can be found in elementary school children as well. For example, it has been shown that Mexican-American culture emphasizes orientation to the group, respect for authority, and a passive coping style. The behaviors of the children in this study reflect these values. In contrast, Black culture has been portrayed as encouraging expressiveness and active engagement with others. In this study, the Black children were more likely to express feelings of anger, explain their behaviors to teachers, and take action in dealing with social situations. (CG)

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ETHNIC BEHAVIOR PATTERNS AMONG BLACK AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN SCHOOL CHILDREN*

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An important aspect of children's socialization is their learning of the norms and rules of social behavior and the expected behavior for a variety of interpersonal situations. The norms, rules and actual behaviors vary among American ethnic groups, but there is very little research on how and when children acquire the behavior patterns of their ethnic group. In a previous study, Empey, Phinney, and Rotheram (1983) demonstrated ethnic differences in behavior among boys from two ethnic groups. Black boys, after viewing videotaped scenes of common social situations, said that they would respond in ways that were direct, assertive, and active; responses of Mexican-American boys, in contrast, were more passive and self-effacing. The goal of the present research was to gain further understanding of differences between two ethnic groups, Blacks and Mexican-Americans, in the social behavior patterns of both boys and girls at two different ages.

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Method

Videotapes were produced showing brief social episodes that occur commonly in elementary schools. Eight episodes were taped, each in four versions: with children of each sex and each ethnic group (Mexican-American and Black). The subjects were 127 Black (Bl) and Mexican-American (MA) third and sixth grade boys and girls from urban elementary school classrooms in which the ethnic balance was at least 40% of each ethnic group. Subjects saw tapes of their own sex and ethnic group. After viewing each scene, children recorded what they themselves would do in that situation. Children's responses were sorted into response categories for each scene. Chi square analysis was used to examine ethnic group differences over-all and by age and sex.

Results

There were significant ethnic group differences on five of the eight scenes. The differences were stronger at the sixth grade than at the third grade, and more evident among boys than among girls. The results will be discussed for pairs of scenes dealing with a common issue, and then will be examined for broad ethnic behavior patterns that cut across scenes.

In two scenes, the child has an opportunity to share with a peer who needs something. In one scene, the child is asked for a loan of 35 cents. The ethnic group differences are significant at the sixth grade level ($p < .005$), and approach significance for the group as a whole ($p=.08$) and for females ($p=.09$). However, even for the comparisons that are not significant, the direction of effect is the same. For the group as a whole, for both grade levels, and for both sexes, a substantially higher proportion of Mexican-American children than Black children say they

would share, and a higher (or in one case, equal) proportion of Black children than Mexican-American children say they would not share.

In the second sharing scene, a peer who is not a friend has forgotten his (or her) lunch. The results in this case are in the same direction as above and highly significant. The ethnic group differences are highly significant over-all ($p < .001$), at the sixth grade ($p < .01$), and among both boys ($p < .01$) and girls ($p < .05$). Nearly twice the percentage of Mexican-Americans as Blacks would share, and two to three times as many Blacks as Mexican-Americans would not share. In neither of the two scenes do the groups differ on the qualified sharing (i.e., the child would share under certain circumstances.

Two scenes deal with a possible confrontation with a peer. In one case a child who is reading aloud has his (or her) pronunciation corrected by a peer. The ethnic group differences are significant over-all ($p < .05$) and among boys ($p < .05$) and girls ($p < .01$), and approach signficance at the sixth grade ($p = .07$). The biggest difference between the groups is in the far stronger tendency of the Black children to feel mad in this situation, although only a small proportion of children over-all give this response. In addition, there are marked differences in the other responses. With the exception of the boys, Black children are more likely to verbalize thanks for the peer who corrects them; Mexican-American children, again except for the boys, are more likely simply to correct the error without saying anything.

In a second confrontation scene, a child is told that he (or she) cannot play on a team. The ethnic group differences are significant at

sixth grade ($p < .01$) and among the boys ($p < .03$), and approach significance over-all ($p = .07$). The responses for the entire sample are fairly evenly divided over four categories. Two of these, "leave" and "ask why" show clear grade differences (with more older children asking why) but no ethnic group differences. The two other categories show strong ethnic differences. Far more Mexican-American children (except at the third grade) would tell the teacher, and Black children in all cases are much more likely to get mad and/or demand to play.

Of two scenes in which a child has the opportunity of taking action, only one showed ethnic group differences. In this case, the child sees a fight beginning to develop between two peers. There are significant differences for ethnicity over-all ($p < .05$), at the third grade ($p < .05$), and among boys ($p < 02$), and differences approach significance at the sixth grade ($p < .10$). Mexican-American children are twice as likely as Blacks to tell the teacher in this situation, and are somewhat more likely to talk to the participants. Black children, in the other hand, are more likely to join in physically, either to stop or to encourage the fight.

A final group of scenes involve a confrontation with an adult, where a child is scolded by the teacher. There are significant ethnic group diffences in only one of these scenes, a situation where a child is scolded for misbehavior on the playground. Ethnic group differences are significant at the sixth grade ($p < .02$) and approach signficance over-all ($p < .10$) and among boys ($p < .10$). Mexican-American children

are more likely to change their behavior or to simply feel bad, whereas Black children are more apt to make a verbal response to the teacher, either explaining the behavior or saying they are sorry.

Discussion

These differences replicate the findings of the previous study. They demonstrate that cultural differences become clearer over the years of middle childhood and are more marked among boys than girls. The results provide evidence that cultural differences that have been identified among adults are present in elementary school children. For example, it has been shown that the Mexican-American culture emphasizes orientation to the group rather than the individual, encourages respect for and subservience to authority, and fosters a passive coping style (Holtzman, Diaz-Guerrero, & Swartz, 1975). The behaviors of the children in this study reflect these values. In thinking of the group rather than the individual, Mexican-American children are likely to share; given their subservience to authority, they tend to change their behavior or feel bad when scolded. Related to this value, and also reflecting a more passive style, the Mexican-American children inform the teacher rather than taking action themselves in dealing with interpersonal situations.

In contrast, Black culture has been portrayed as a high intensity culture which encourages expressiveness and active engagement with others (e.g., Kochman, 1981). Thus Black children are more likely to express feelings of anger, to explain their behaviors to the teacher, or to take action in dealing with social situations. A better understanding of these differences and how they develop in children would contribute to better intergroup relations in integrated schools.

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